

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A bacterial strain of ~~B. subtilis~~ *B. subtilis* having a *ywfL* gene product involved in the biosynthesis of iso-valeric acids, wherein the *ywfL* gene which product has been deleted or is essentially non-functional, such that the strain cannot produce substantial amounts of iso-valeric acids is essentially devoid of any capability for iso-valeric acid production.

2. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ *B. subtilis* strain of claim 1, which is ~~B. natto~~ *B. natto* and which does not produce taste perceptible amounts of iso-valeric acids.

3-4 (Cancelled).

5. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ *B. subtilis* strain of claim 1, that contains no exogenous DNA sequences.

6. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ *B. subtilis* strain of claim 1, prepared by recombinant gene technology.

7. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ *B. subtilis* strain of claim 6, which is ~~B. natto~~ *B. natto* I-2077.

8. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ *B. subtilis* strain of claim 1, prepared by mutagenesis and selection.

9-14. (Cancelled).

15. (Currently Amended) A bacterial strain of ~~B. subtilis~~ *B. subtilis* having a *ywfL* gene product involved in the biosynthesis of iso-valeric acids, which product has been deleted, such that the strain cannot produce substantial amounts of iso-valeric acids is essentially devoid of any capability for iso-valeric acid production.

16. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ B. subtilis strain of claim 15, which is ~~B. natto~~ B. natto and which does not produce taste perceptible amounts of iso-valeric acids.

17. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ B. subtilis strain of claim 15, that contains no exogenous DNA sequences.

18. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ B. subtilis strain of claim 15, prepared by recombinant gene technology.

19. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ B. subtilis strain of claim 18, which is ~~B. natto~~ B. natto I-2077.

20. (Currently Amended) The ~~B. subtilis~~ B. subtilis strain of claim 15, prepared by mutagenesis and selection.